

THE STUDY OF MAN

COMMUNISM, DEMOCRACY, AND THE CHURCHES

Problems of "Mobilizing the Religious Front"

WILL HERBERG

THE record of America's religious leaders in the struggle against Communism is hardly such as to give satisfaction to those concerned with the role of the churches in the nation's life. One does not have in mind the tiny (though not insignificant) fraction of clergymen who have been Communists or close fellow-travelers—the vast majority of the American clergy of all denominations have always been free of such sympathies. Yet it remains a fact that for all their sincere devotion to democratic and religious

A NUMBER of thinkers have been troubled by the lack of clarity and the division of counsel that have marked the struggle against Communism on the part of various religious groups. WILL HERBERG here reports and ponders upon a Washington conference of leaders, lay and spiritual, of the three faiths that gathered together to form a religious front against the Communist threat to our civilization. Mr. Herberg, himself a participant and quite sympathetic with the ends of the conference, highlights what seem to him the basic, continuing issues raised by the conference, and critically examines some proposed solutions. Mr. Herberg, who is the author of *Judaism and Modern Man: An Interpretation of Jewish Religion* (1951) and of *Protestant-Catholic-Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* to be published by Doubleday this fall, is recognized as one of the most incisive and stimulating thinkers of the current religious "revival." His previous articles in COMMENTARY, both on religious and sociological subjects, have been nationally discussed, and he has also appeared in most of the leading religious and "opinion-molding" magazines in this country. He has lectured extensively at leading universities and seminaries in the United States.

ideals, many representative spokesmen of American religion, particularly of Protestantism and Judaism, have exhibited a strange ambivalence in opposing Communism.

They have criticized its errors, condemned its brutalities and, under the urging of "outside" counsel, repudiated its fronts—but with a curious reluctance, not at all with the passionate zeal with which they denounced Nazism in the 1930's. Apparently, they have not felt impelled to take the lead in arousing the public conscience to the threat of Communist totalitarianism. By and large, religious leaders, however sincere, have been far less vehement against Communism than against "reaction" and "fascism" at home. Their sense of Communist immorality seems to be dulled by their abhorrence of the ex-Communist "turned informer." And whereas anti-fascism was regarded as a noble cause, anti-Communism is deprecated as "sterile" and "negative."

Indeed, what polemics they do launch against Communism tend to be disputes about doctrine, often sounding little different from disputations between denominations within the same church. Seldom does one get the sense that the opponent is not a mere individual dissenter or a deviant ideology but the agent or agency of "the worst hell of tyranny men have ever invented," as Reinhold Niebuhr has called it—an active conspiracy that maintains and advances itself by systematic mendacity and terror, by the obliteration of human rights, and by the literal extermination of the individuals and groups that oppose its will.

DESPITE all that has happened to peoples, and to churches as well, in so many countries, some of our religious leaders still seem

blind to the devices by which Communists entrap the unwary. Respectable church papers carry articles and reviews that would be more appropriate in the *Nation*, and there has hardly been a major church conference in recent years that has not adopted resolutions which, while denouncing Communism, give comfort to those opposing the active anti-Communist struggle. In short, no one with any first-hand knowledge of the dominant attitudes in the Protestant church and the Jewish synagogue would find much to challenge in the Reverend John Sutherland Bonnell's judgment that present-day religious leadership "lacks conviction, passion, and militancy in combating Communism." Though all acknowledge Communism to be the gravest threat Western civilization and Jewish-Christian faith have yet encountered, something somehow immobilizes them when they come face to face with Communism and takes the heart out of their fight against it.

It is hard to say just what it is that does this. Perhaps residual illusions of the "Social Gospel" are involved, perhaps the influence, too, of a prevailing type of secular progressivism in which American populist and Marxist conceptions are blended. After all, social-minded ministers who have been brought up to regard collectivism as somehow closer to the religious norm of love and brotherhood than any other form of economy can hardly help feeling an obscure sympathy for the Communist "idea" despite all the horrors of its actuality. For them, the clichés and slogans of a stereotyped, ritualistic liberalism take on all the majesty of prophetic utterance. Perhaps this contemporary kind of pseudo-prophetism is the largest single factor in confusing so many religious leaders and blunting their opposition to Communism.

But perhaps an even bigger factor is anti-Catholicism. I have myself heard an eminent Protestant leader say that one must be "careful" how one opposes Communism lest one "play into the hands of Rome." At the religious conference reported in this article, a labor man recalled bitterly that some years ago, when the CIO was fighting a recently expelled Communist-dominated union, some Protestant ministers lined up with the Communists on the ground that the CIO was backed by "the Catholics." There can be little doubt that the pervasive fear of Rome, fed by reports of the persecution of Protestants in Spain and Latin America, has vitiated the Protestant witness against Communism.

Among Jewish leaders the chief factor undoubtedly is the abiding abhorrence of Nazism and the fact that the Soviet Union was our ally against Hitler, at least during the period of American participation in the war. But both the factors I have mentioned—pseudo-prophetic "progressivism" and an ingrained mistrust of Catholicism—seem to be just as widespread as among the Protestant clergy. A report of the religious conference to which I have referred, published recently in a well-known Jewish weekly, noted that "the Roman Catholic hierarchy and laity were very much in evidence," and went on to warn that the movement "will bear watching by democratically oriented religious and community organizations." It is unfortunately true that a good deal of Catholic anti-Communism has been crude and uncritical. Much of it has consisted in oversimplified pictures of a "God-fearing" America confronting an "atheistic" and "materialistic" foe. The source of the peril in Communism has not always been clearly defined by Catholics and the alignment of forces has often been too narrowly drawn, to the virtual exclusion of secular humanists from the democratic camp. Nevertheless, American Catholicism has, on the whole, been unequivocal and effective in its opposition to Communism, and has indeed contributed much of the impulse that has made the trade union movement in America so solidly anti-Communist.

THE National Conference on the Spiritual Foundations of Our Democracy was an effort to break through the inhibitions and misconceptions that have hitherto weakened the religious witness against Communism. It was also an effort to effect a new consolidation of the religious front for democracy. In externals, the Washington conference seemed much like all such American religious conferences: it was earnest, idealistic, exhortative, abounding in piety and good will. But in one respect, at least, it was different: it was completely free, on the one side, from the kind of rhetorical vaunting of American democracy generally so popular at such gatherings; and, on the other, of that brand of indiscriminate devaluation of present-day American life which seems to make so many clergymen incapable of seeing the infinitely greater evil of Communist totalitarianism. It did not proclaim the United States to be the immaculate champion of God called on to enforce the American Way of Life

upon a sinful world. Nor did it fall into the posture, so characteristic of many recent religious gatherings, of wringing its hands in pious anguish over the "Red-baiting" and "witch-hunting" presumed to be devastating our civil liberties. This fact alone would have been enough to endow the conference with a special quality, a quality that was further enhanced by the scope and seriousness of its discussions and the fundamental nature of the problems it raised.

THE conference was sponsored by the Foundation for Religious Action in the Social and Civil Order. Both Foundation and conference were conceived and promoted by three men quite different in temperament and background, Charles W. Lowry, Edward L. R. Elson, and Elton Trueblood.

Charles W. Lowry, an Episcopalian, two years ago resigned his rectorship at All Saints Church, Chevy Chase, Maryland, in order to establish the Foundation and direct its activities. Before that, he had been professor of theology at the Virginia Episcopal Seminary, one of the most highly regarded Protestant institutions in the country. While still with All Saints Church, he wrote a study of the contemporary confrontation of faiths, *Communism and Christ*, in which a good deal of the fundamental thinking behind the movement he was to launch was already in evidence. Dr. Lowry is a sophisticated theologian, but a man of action, too, with a deep sense of calling.

Edward L. R. Elson has for nine years been pastor of the National Presbyterian Church—"President Eisenhower's church"—in Washington. Between 1941 and 1946, he served as chaplain in the army. A gifted preacher and vigorous churchman, he is widely known as the author of *America's Spiritual Recovery*.

Elton Trueblood, one of the most distinguished of living Quakers, is the author of two important theological works, *The Predicament of Modern Man* and *The Logic of Belief*, and of half a dozen smaller works dealing with the meaning of faith amidst the perplexities of our time. Coming from the university chaplaincy at Stanford, he served for some years as professor of philosophy at Earlham College, the Quaker liberal arts school in Indiana. While retaining his connection with that institution, he has served since 1954 as chief of religious policy of the United States Information Agency. Dr. Trueblood is a layman, deeply concerned

with the layman's vocation in the religious life of the modern world. Though not an officer of the Foundation for Religious Action—Lowry is chairman and executive director, Elson co-chairman—his influence in it is unmistakable.

The Foundation was established in November 1953 with a program emphasizing two major aims: "(1) to stress the importance of religious truth in the preservation and development of genuine democracy; and (2) to unite all believers in God in the struggle between the free world and atheistic Communism, which aims to destroy both religion and liberty." It was able to set up a National Advisory Council studded with distinguished and influential names, lay and clerical: Catholic Bishops Wright and Ready; Episcopal Bishops Powell and Tucker, Methodist Bishop Holt, together with such outstanding Protestant churchmen as Louis H. Evans, Billy Graham, Ralph Sockman, Norman Vincent Peale, and Frederick Brown Harris; Jewish leaders such as Judge Joseph M. Proskauer, Maxwell Abbell of the United Synagogue, and Rabbis Norman Gerstenfeld and Edgar F. Magnin; college presidents such as Gordon Gray of North Carolina, Theodore M. Hesburgh of Notre Dame, Robert L. Johnson of Temple, Benjamin E. Mays of Morehouse, George Shuster of Hunter, and W. R. White of Baylor; eminent laymen including Henry Ford II, Henry R. Luce, Herbert Hoover, AEC Commissioner Thomas E. Murray, William R. Castle, Charles Edward Wilson, President George Meany of the AFL, and others in all walks of life. Many of the members of the National Advisory Council were present at the conference, making clear by their active concern in the movement that the Foundation was something more than a mere letterhead organization.

WELL over two hundred people attended the sessions of the conference, which were held at the Sheraton-Carlton in Washington on November 8, 9, and 10, 1954. There was little formality about the occasion, but the program of the conference had been carefully arranged and on the whole was scrupulously adhered to. The sessions ran nearly twelve hours a day—almost continuously from 9:30 A.M., when the morning sessions began, to nine or ten in the evening, when the dinner meetings closed. The volume of talk was vast, and one cannot hope in a report like this to render even a fair summary of it. We shall try here

only to outline the scope of the conference, and focus on some of the high points that seem to this writer most significant.

At the opening dinner meeting, addresses on "The Predicament of Our Age" were delivered by Thomas E. Murray of the Atomic Energy Commission and Albert T. Mollegen, professor at the Virginia Episcopal Seminary. Murray, a Roman Catholic layman, spoke of the terrible situation into which the atom bomb had driven mankind, and stressed that these very weapons were "bringing man to a realization that the basic human predicament lies deeper than the issues of life and death: it is to be found rather in man's eternal situation between good and evil." "The universal moral law," he emphasized, "must remain in undisputed control over atomic weapons. . . . A sense of personal responsibility must be recovered, the noble Christian concept of sacrifice must be recaptured."

Mollegen, a Protestant theologian, began in a sense where Murray left off. He strove to show that the predicament went deeper than could be envisaged from the standpoint of the natural law, for even with the best of intentions and with the utmost loyalty to the "universal moral law," we are so caught in the vise of contemporary history that whatever we do seems only to heighten our peril. The hydrogen bomb, on which the whole free world depends for its security against Soviet aggression, and which at the same time threatens us all with annihilation, is the symbol, at once tragic and ironic, of the predicament in which we find ourselves. Drawing upon Augustine, who also had to live through a deep crisis of history, Mollegen explored the resources of faith from which contemporary man might draw the insight and courage necessary to deal with the overwhelming responsibilities of our time.

These two addresses, so different and yet so alike in their deep concern, struck the keynote of the conference. The first plenary session, the next morning, heard a paper by this writer on "The Biblical Basis of American Democracy," which attempted to show that American democracy was rooted in the Biblical view of man, his "grandeur" and his "misery," his freedom and his responsibility; it traced the democratic conception of the constitutional limited-power state to the realism about human nature in politics derived from a Biblical understanding of human existence; and it warned against the temptation, so widespread today, of con-

verting democracy into a religious absolute in order to have a dynamic faith with which to meet the challenge of Communism. The questions raised in the paper were vigorously discussed, at this and later sessions.

PRESIDENT EISENHOWER spoke briefly at the luncheon meeting that followed. Immediately after, Senator Stuart Symington and Judge Matthew F. McGuire spoke in a laymen's panel on "God and Government." At the afternoon plenary session, the Reverend Theodore M. Hesburgh, president of Notre Dame, presented a paper on "The Necessity of Faith in a Living Democracy." It was a carefully prepared and well thought-out statement of the Catholic position. He explicitly warned against "faith in a living democracy" being interpreted as one in which democracy was held to be "the object of our faith." The faith he was talking about, he said, was "vital religious faith, based upon the most secure foundation of God's word." The problem, then, was to provide a "bridge between religion and politics," because only if our commitment to democracy was grounded in something deeper and really ultimate would it be able to survive. Father Hesburgh drew on many sources in developing his thesis, but particularly on Jacques Maritain.

The dinner meeting that evening was devoted to a discussion of "Practical Steps for Strengthening American Democracy." Rabbi Edgar F. Magnin of Los Angeles spoke in his exuberant, "down-to-earth" manner; Thomas H. Mahony, a prominent Catholic jurist, presented a rather solid paper urging education; and Louis Evans, minister-at-large of the Presbyterian Church, exhorted the audience to defeat Communism by "lay infiltration" of Americans into foreign parts. This observer, at least, did not feel that much that was "practical" was brought forward at this session.

The last plenary session, on the morning of November 10, heard Dr. Lowry read a comprehensive paper on "Democracy's Answer to the Marxian Dialectic." Dr. Lowry presented a concise, learned view of Marxism as a politico-philosophical system, and then proceeded to examine "democracy's answer," which, he emphasized, could not be merely an academic refutation, but had to take the form of what might be called an "existential dialogue" in which the real sources of the Marxist dynamic are uncovered, its inadequacies and perversities revealed, and the "democratic faith" presented

in its concreteness. "Democracy," Dr. Lowry asserted, was "first a faith; second, a political principle; third, an economic doctrine; and fourth, the vision of a good society." Each of these aspects he subjected to an analysis which opened many questions. The report culminated in an appeal for a "new social goal"—the "vision of a world society in which is posited a progressive solution of the basic material problems of mankind hitherto regarded as objectively beyond the capacity of the human race."

A CONFERENCE is too often merely the occasion for a platform to be presented and the official speakers to have their say. In this case, however, the assemblage (they were not exactly delegates, since they did not come representing their organizations) was of at least equal importance. It was full of vigor and character. There were plenty of clergymen and theologians present, but the laymen—educators, economists, businessmen, men high in the military and diplomatic service, labor leaders—made themselves heard to great effect. The majority of the participants were Protestants, but I think most observers would agree that (aside from the scheduled speakers) it was the Catholics who made the deepest impression. For one thing, they included men of the highest caliber—Gustave Weigel and John Courtney Murray, both Jesuits, and among the two most brilliant Catholic theologians in this country; George G. Higgins and John F. Cronin, assistant directors of the social action department of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, two priests with a national reputation for their understanding of the social movements and ideologies of our time. These men, and others of their communion, spoke sparingly, but what they said was to the point. They were listened to with appreciation; indeed, I do not recall a serious conference touching controversial issues where relations between the various denominations were so free of strain and tension.

There was a sprinkling of Jews at the conference—such men as S. Andhil Fineberg of the American Jewish Committee, Eugene Lipman, director of social action of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, and Philip Schiff of the National Jewish Welfare Board, in addition to those I have already mentioned as members of the National Advisory Council—but by and large the Jewish word was not heard. The writer contributed something, he hopes, and

Isaac Franck of the Jewish Community Council in Washington impressed the audience with his forceful warning against the danger of "idolatrizing" religion itself. Beyond that there was very little heard from Jewish participants, which was unfortunate in view of the genuine eagerness one sensed to hear what American Jewry had to say about the problems of religion, Communism, and democracy.

Of particular interest at the conference was the participation of two labor leaders, Arthur G. McDowell of the AFL and John Ramsay of the CIO, both Protestants, who stirred the assemblage with sharp criticism of the equivocal attitude to Communism shown by sections of the Protestant clergy in past years. Generally noteworthy was the part played by laymen who tried to relate their special experience to the thinking of the conference.

As I have suggested, the conference's importance lay more in the questions it raised, and perhaps sharpened, than in any definitive solutions it offered. To this writer's mind, the major issues that emerged were four, and some account of these, as they shaped themselves at the conference, may prove instructive.

(1) *Communism as religion.* Each of the three speakers at the plenary sessions, and many of those who took part in the discussion, stressed the fact that Communism, while it confronts us immediately as a Moscow-directed international politico-military power bloc and conspiracy, gains much of its strength from the fact that it is, on the moral and spiritual level, something more. It is in its ultimate dimension a "secular religion" that provides its devotees with a complete system for understanding the world, past, present, and future; a cause and a commitment; a promise of fulfilment—in short, a vision of the absolute. Moreover, Communism is a direct if illegitimate offspring of the Judeo-Christian Messianic tradition. When science and modern life seemed to strip religion of its plausibility, the Western world's religious hope of redemption—the Messiah of the Jews and the Second Coming of the Christians—turned to all sorts of secular utopias, foremost among them being Communism. The dynamic of Communism is, then, in the last analysis, a religious dynamic, with an eschatological passion that only faith can give. This theme was stressed in Dr. Lowry's paper, but it appeared again and again throughout the discussions.

But the conception of Communism as a faith or religion, valid as it is, tends to create certain dangerous confusions. Religion is highly regarded in America; if Communism is a religion, is it not therefore entitled to the freedom, toleration, and respect owing to all religions? Is not anti-Communism both futile—because religions, we are told, cannot be suppressed—and undemocratic—because democracy guarantees the freedom of religion?

Some such logic would seem to be responsible, in part at least, for the ambiguity and indecision of so much of the Protestant witness against Communism in the past, nor has it altogether disappeared from more recent church pronouncements and gatherings, including the Evanston Assembly of the World Council. Protestants are not alone in this confusion; many Jews share it, too, and also numerous "unbelievers" who uphold freedom of religion. All these groups tend to be immobilized in their resistance to Communism as soon as they begin to perceive that on a certain level it must be regarded as a religion of sorts.

What they do not understand, but what was made quite explicit at the Washington conference, is that while Communism in its ultimate dimension is indeed a religion, it is *also* a politico-military conspiracy, and a totalitarian political regime. Nor is it true that democracy prescribes toleration for *all* religions. Thuggee was once a flourishing religious cult in India; its devotees waylaid and strangled certain kinds of travelers out of piety, dedicating their victims to Kali, the Hindu goddess of destruction. Does anyone believe that democracy requires freedom for such a religion, even where, for the time being, it limits itself simply to preaching instead of acting on the duty and merit of strangling wayfarers? The British rigorously suppressed the Thuggee sect in the 1830's, and it does not appear that they thereby limited real freedom of religion—though the problem of winning its devotees away from their pernicious faith still remained. The analogy with Communism is obvious.

All this was not made explicit, but it ran implicit through the entire discussion. The speakers in their papers, as well as the conference members from the floor, were able to discuss the religious aspect of Communism in a sober and restrained manner without forgetting for a moment that Communism confronts us in the first place as a political and military threat to our very existence.

(2) *Religion and democracy.* On another question, flowing directly from the conception of Communism as a religion—how shall we meet Communism on the religious level?—there was a good deal of hesitation and uncertainty. Taken as a whole, the challenge of Communism is multi-dimensional—military, political, spiritual. We know how to meet it on the front of military aggression and internal subversion. As against the totalitarian state, we offer the open democratic society. Democracy is thus our answer to Communism on the political level. But, as we have seen, Communism is also a faith and a commitment. With what do we meet it on this level? Meet it with something we must, if we do not want the battle for the souls of men to go by default. "The human spirit," Pascal has pointed out, "believes and loves so naturally that if it does not have true objects of faith and love, it will have faith in and love false things."

To meet the religious challenge of Communism, there has been a tendency in some liberal circles in the United States to make democracy itself into the object of a religious cult, in the hope of developing a spiritual dynamic with which to meet Communism on the ultimate level. Democracy, we are told, is not merely a social and political order, a *means* whereby men can fashion their lives in freedom and responsibility; it is itself an end, the Way of Life, the highest truth, the ultimate commitment of all free men. It is a religious absolute.

But the problem here is that once democracy converts itself into a religious absolute it transforms itself into something other than democracy—it becomes totalitarian; it also becomes idolatrous. As such it becomes repugnant alike to the true democrat and to the man of Jewish-Christian faith. To the democrat, democracy is instrumental; it involves "agreement on the good of man on the level of performance, without the necessity of agreement on ultimates," as the Harvard Committee Report on General Education in a Free Society puts it. To the man of faith, only God is absolute, and nothing that is not God, no matter how good, or true, or beautiful, can lay claim to ultimacy. Both the man of faith and the democrat—who are of course often the same man—share the conviction of the "free American citizen," in the words of Elliot Cohen, that "whether he professes to believe in God or professes not to believe in God, he has a conviction that there is no god but God. . . . [Whatever he may

believe, the 'free American citizen'] does *not* believe that there is any idea, institution, or individual—a man, a nation, or an 'ism'—that man can accept as God. . . ." (COMMENTARY, September 1952).

At the Washington conference there was much talk about "faith in democracy" which very easily turned into advocacy of "democracy as a faith." But there was also sharp protest against this attitude on both religious and democratic grounds. Such protest was voiced in Father Hesburgh's as well as this writer's paper, and in many comments from the floor. Gustave Weigel, the Jesuit theologian, put it this way: "My religious faith impels me to affirm and support democracy, but democracy is not my religious faith." This statement, I think, expressed the prevailing view of those participating in the conference.

How, then, is Communism to be met on the ultimate level? There was very little direct discussion of this question at the conference, but what there was made it clear that only a transcendent faith that finds its absolute *beyond* the ideas, institutions, or allegiances of the world could meet the challenge of the demonic idolatry of Communism without falling into idolatry itself. To be genuinely democratic, in this writer's view, democracy cannot refuse to recognize a majesty beyond its own, the majesty of the God who transcends all the relativities of the world and beside whom there is no other.

(3) *Religion as "cure-all."* The American religious mind has always been prone to an oversimple idealism which regards religion as primarily a matter of high ideals whose mere evocation brings peace of mind, moral regeneration, and social progress and reform. This faith in religion—which is by no means the same as religious faith in God—has been intensified by the widespread disillusionment with the secular utopias that only a generation ago were promising universal redemption through economics and politics. As a result, there is a strong disposition—in the new enthusiasm for religion that has gripped the American people—to think of religion as a cure-all that makes critical scrutiny of social institutions or any constructive thinking about social problems supererogatory.

There is no denying that this attitude, too, made itself felt at the conference. Dr. Lowry warned against it in the preliminary material

and in his remarks early in the sessions. "We are undoubtedly in the midst of a widespread and powerful revival of religion," he said. "There is, however, a real danger of this spiritual current running up a steep wall of compulsive escapism and becoming a giant pool of stagnation and futility instead of a vital tide of constructive energy and new creative work." Despite this warning, the naive "religionism" so characteristic of the American religious mind cropped up again and again in the exhortations that came from both clergy and laymen on the floor of the conference.

Indeed, there was so much of this kind of religious utopianism at certain points of the proceedings that several men present felt it necessary to raise their voice in reiterated warning. Particularly effective were the admonitions uttered by the Reverend George G. Higgins of the National Catholic Welfare Conference and by Isaac Franck of the Jewish Community Council in Washington. Father Higgins pointed out that religious faith is not a substitute for constructive social thinking and realistic dealing with social problems, but rather (in this area at least) an indispensable moral and intellectual resource for meeting our responsibilities in the world. Mr. Franck, in impressive words, cautioned against turning religion into a new idolatry by getting into the habit of looking to it to resolve all our difficulties and to restore all our threatened securities. These admonitions were heard with attention, but I do not think they were quite understood by some of the members of the conference, so strong is the strain of pietism and "faith in faith" in American religion. It would seem that this is a problem which those who are striving to bring out the authentic meaning of Jewish-Christian faith in its relevance to life will have to grapple with more effectively than they have hitherto done.

(4) *Religious front for democracy.* The most basic question which the conference raised was not raised at it but rather *by* it. It will be remembered that one of the primary aims of the Foundation for Religious Action, which conceived and sponsored the conference, was "to unite all believers in God in the struggle between the free world and atheistic Communism, which aims to destroy both religion and liberty." There is no doubt that the basic idea of the conference was the conviction, which this writer shares, that the believer may find

in Jewish-Christian faith both a deeper understanding of democracy and a powerful spiritual dynamic with which to meet and overcome Communism on the religious level. Nonetheless, this view raises a question which requires clarification.

Is it either possible or desirable to build an ideological front in defense of democracy purely on religious grounds, drawing the line between those who "believe in God" and those who do not? The Foundation program does not propose this, nor did the conference officially, but something of the sort seemed to run as a strong undercurrent in the discussion at many points in the sessions. And the implications of this position seemed far from being fully understood or appreciated.

It is one thing to say that no real justification for our kind of democracy or real dynamic in its defense against Communist totalitarianism is possible that does not draw upon the insights and resources of Jewish-Christian faith; it is another and vastly different thing to say that only those who explicitly avow this faith can be included in the democratic front against Communism. The first statement seems to be basically true, the second manifestly and dangerously false. For even those who do not themselves explicitly "believe in God" or affirm Jewish-Christian faith may be filled with the insights and moral passion that this faith has brought forth. Men—thank God—are often better than their official philosophies, and many a secular liberal who brashly proclaims himself without God may well be doing God's work. In the book of Isaiah, God is represented as speaking of the pagan Cyrus: "I have girded him though he has not known me." What was said of Cyrus may surely be true of many of the secular liberals of our time; perhaps God has girded them though they have not known him.

After all, they are the products of a long religious tradition, which they cannot throw off simply by disavowing. The man of faith must recognize that, despite their avowed lack of faith, they may be his allies and fellow combatants in the fight for human freedom, and he will be seriously concerned that he serve the God he knows at least as well as do many of them who serve a God unknown.

RELIGION has frequently been a source of confusion in political life precisely because of its too great readiness to lapse into holier-

than-thou attitudes. It is always misleading and dangerous simply to translate the absolutes of religion into the relativities of politics.

Warning is thus needed that an alignment defined by explicit "belief in God"—as to implicit belief, who can judge of another?—cannot be taken as final in the realm of politics. Yet this does not make the attempt to mobilize people of Jewish-Christian faith in defense of democracy either unnecessary or undesirable, since only from the resources of faith, it seems to me, can an adequate "philosophy" of democracy be constructed and the capacity for an unyielding resistance to totalitarianism generated.

True, the secular liberal sometimes displays a loyalty to the transcendent God whom he does not acknowledge that puts the man of faith to shame, but his philosophy seems to lack the inner power to replenish, much less add to, the spiritual capital inherited from his religious tradition or to generate his own kind of loyalty and understanding in others.

A religious mobilization for democracy thus has its justification—*provided* the explicit avowal of religion is not made the principle of separation of the sheep from the goats in the confrontation of democracy with Communism. The sound principle of separation, *on the plane of politics*, can only be allegiance to a democracy that refuses to absolutize itself, as it refuses to absolutize any idea, institution, or "ism"—to a democracy, in short, that explicitly or implicitly recognizes a majesty beyond itself. Within this larger front, the man of Jewish-Christian faith has his own witness to bear, but, to reiterate, he is on dangerous ground when he converts his faith into an ideological touchstone for genuine democratic conviction.

It is not easy to grasp this paradox of the absolute and the relative, of faith and politics, and many religious people tend to be impatient with such subtleties. Yet unless it is grasped, and its implications fully appreciated, the best efforts of the people of religious faith will be confounded and stultified. And sound, effective anti-Communism will be stultified, too. It is perhaps the chief merit of the Washington conference that it measurably enhanced the possibility of a religious mobilization for democracy along lines calculated to strengthen, rather than to confuse, the larger democratic front against Communist totalitarianism. Whether it can go forward to deepen its insights and translate them into practical measures remains to be seen.